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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "F", 411TH INFANTRY (103RD
INFANTRY DIVISION) NEAR CLIMBACH, FRANCE, (ALSACE),
14 DECEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Company Commander).

Type of Operation described: INFANTRY RIFLE COMPANY (REIN-
FORCED) AS THE INFANTRY ELEMENTS OF A TASK FORCE IN THE ATTACK
OF A STRONGLY DEFENDED TOWN.

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- A-9 Thirty-five letters received during December 1949 and January 1950 from members of "F" Company, 411th Infantry Regiment, who participated in the Battle for Climbach. (Personal possession of author).
- A-10 Statement of Major Osborn Cooper, Communications Officer, 411th Infantry Regiment, (Later S-3 of Task Force Blackshear) who was present during the battle for Climbach. (Personal possession of author).
- A-11 Statement of Major James J. Barda, S-3 of Task Force Blackshear. (Personal possession of author).

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the Operations of Company "F", 411th Infantry, 103rd Infantry Division in the attack near Climbach, France, (Alsace), 14 December 1944, during the Seventh Army drive to the Siegfried Line.

To properly orient the reader, it will be necessary to discuss, briefly, the major events which led up to this action.

In August 1944, the Seventh United States Army successfully made amphibious landings in Southern France and commenced its drive to the North. (See Map A) (1)

During the night of 10-11 September 1944, an Armored Reconnaissance Group of Seventh Army operating west of Dijon met a patrol from the 2nd French Armored Division of the Third United States Army. This meeting at Somberron linked the Normandy front with that of Southern France. There was now a continuous front in strength from the English Channel to the Mediterranean Sea. (2)

On 18 November 1944, VI Corps, part of the U. S. Seventh Army, issued Field Order Number 8 outlining the direction of the drive generally eastward through the Vosges Mountains to Strasbourg on the Rhine River. (3)

On 23 November 1944, the Corps drive reached through the Saverne Gap in the Vosges Mountains and up to the City of Strasbourg. (4)

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- (1) A-1, p. 145-151
(2) A-1, p. 271, 272
(3) A-2, p. 425
(4) A-2, p. 457

On 24 November 1944, General Eisenhower changed the Seventh Army's direction of advance from eastward to north-eastward, with the main force astride the Low Vosges Mountains and up the Rhine River Valley. When it had cleared the enemy out of it's zone, which was bounded by the Rhine River, the Siegfried Line, and the Sarre River, the Seventh Army, in a coordinated action with the Third Army, would break across the Siegfried Line into that part of Germany known as the Saar-Palatinate. On 5 December 1944, VI Corps was ready to launch the offensive to the North as part of the Seventh Army. (5)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The change in the Seventh Army's direction of advance, which forfeited the possibility of a short-cut into the heart of Germany, meant giving the enemy time to increase the strength of the West Wall (Siegfried Line). (6)

The Germans had on their side the advantages of weather and terrain. December in Alsace is a cloudy month with low ground fogs and drizzling rains. On only five days of the month was the Tactical Air Force able to give close support to the Seventh Army Drive. The ground was cold with frosts, but not sufficiently frozen to support heavy vehicles. Both the softness of the ground and natural terrain obstacles slowed up American armor and put the burden of the advance upon the Infantry. (7)

The Germans were to utilize the natural obstacles of both the Alsace Plain and the Lower Vosges Mountains in their withdrawal to the North. To the north lies the rugged country

(5) A-2, p. 457

(6) A-2, p. 459

(7) A-2, p. 459

of the Hochwald Mountains, and north of the Hochwald Mountains the Lauter River flows to the Rhine River and forms the German Border. On the Alsace Plain and through the mountains the Germans were to defend road blocks and towns and, when forced, would withdraw behind minefields and blown bridges to the most defensible point. Seventh Army G-2 anticipated the plans of German defense and predicted that the enemy would make a stand either at the Maginot Line or at the Siegfried Line. (8)

During the first few days of the month the enemy had organized his forces above the Moder River. Defending the Alsace Plain were the 245th Infantry and the 256th Volksgrenadier Divisions, which had been added to the 361st Volksgrenadier Division, now operating in the eastern part of the Hardt Mountains. On the western slopes of the mountains were elements of both the 130th Panzer and the 25th Panzer-Grenadier Divisions. (9) (See Map B)

On the VI Corps front four divisional lines of advance developed. On line were the 45th Infantry Division, the 103rd Infantry Division, the 14th Armored Division and the 79th Infantry Division. (10)

The 103rd Division, with the 45th Division on its left and the 14th Armored Division on its right was to attack north toward Wissembourg, and its target became the high ground north of Berg-Zabern in the Saar-Palatinate. (11)

At 0530 hours on 10 December the 103rd Division attack jumped off. The 410th Infantry Regiment crossed the Zintzel

(8) A-2, p. 459, 460, 461

(9) A-2, p. 462

(10) A-2, p. 463-477

(11) A-2, p. 473

River over improvised footbridges, swept into the northern half of Mertzwiller, and assaulted enemy strong points in the houses. By the end of the day the 410th Infantry had cleared the town. On the left of the Division zone, northwest of Mertzwiller, the leading battalion of the 411th Infantry Regiment, the 2nd Battalion, had met little opposition in it's crossing of the Zintzel River. (12)

After his defense of Mertzwiller the enemy fought no strong delaying actions against the 103rd Division until he had backed up to the German border. Plastic mines, demolitions, road-blocks defended by small groups, and rear guards in several towns along the way slowed the drive, but failed to stop the advance. As the Division approached the border, however, it met strong rear guards. On 14 December 1944, one of the stiffest battles of the entire month was fought at Climbach. (13)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF THE 411TH INFANTRY

On the morning of 13 December, 1944, the Regiment was ordered to continue the attack, 2nd Battalion on the left, 1st Battalion on the right. Company "F" was selected as lead company of the 2nd Battalion, which was employed in a column of companies astride the road leading North to the Hochwald Mountain. During the day scattered enemy resistance was met in the form of hastily felled trees across the road, defended by delaying parties of squad and platoon size. Anti-tank and anti-personnel mines were encountered in and around these road blocks. Two enemy soldiers who were planting mines in the road were surprised and captured, after a brief fire fight with supporting elements, just before dark. Coincidentally

(12) A-2, p. 474. A-3, p. 43
(13) A-2, p. 475. A-3, p. 44-48

with this action, the Regiment was ordered to halt and prepare defensive positions for the night. (See Map C). Several small pill-boxes, a part of the Maginot Line were within the area occupied by Company "F". Utilizing these positions, a defense against possible enemy attack was organized. On the night of 13-14 December, 1944, the 411th Infantry Regiment was disposed as follows: the 2nd Battalion on the left, approximately 2 miles north of Lampertsloch on Hochwald Mountain, the 1st Battalion on the right abreast of the 2nd Battalion in the Lampertsloch Woods, and the 3rd Battalion in Regimental reserve in the vicinity of Lampertsloch. (14)

Plans to continue the attack the following morning were formulated by the Regimental Commander and his staff. These plans included the continued attack by the 1st Battalion on the right in a northeastwardly direction astride the crest of the Hochwald Mountain to the German border near Weiler, (1 1/4 miles northwest of Wissembourg), maintaining contact with the 409th Infantry Regiment on the right. The 3rd Battalion was ordered to pass through the 2nd Battalion on the left and continue the attack through Lembach Woods to the German border near Bobenthal, maintaining contact with the 45th Infantry Division on the left. The 2nd Battalion, less one company, reverted to Regimental reserve. A task force consisting of one rifle company (reinforced), one platoon of tanks, one platoon of tank destroyers (towed), and necessary medical personnel was to be organized. Division and Corps Artillery were to be in general support and available on call. An artillery liaison party was to be attached to the task force. The mission of this task force was to strike quickly northeast-

(14) A-10, A-11, Personal Knowledge.

ward to seize and hold CLIMBACH. This French (Alsace) border town was the center of the road network used to supply defending enemy troops to the west.

The area occupied by Company "F" was designated the forward assembly area for the Task Force. Final orientation and orders by the Task Force Commander were to be issued at this point. (15)

THE TASK FORCE ORGANIZATION AND PLANS (16) (See APPENDIX I)

In an orientation conducted by the Commander of the Task Force, Lt. Col. John Pope Blackshear, for all officers of the Task Force, the assigned mission of seizing Climbach and the plan for it's accomplishment was discussed. Reliable reports on enemy activity indicated that only scattered resistance could be expected. It was anticipated that this resistance could be neutralized by leading armored elements, and the employment of infantry would be unnecessary until after the objective had been reached. The main body of the Regiment was to follow the Task Force on foot utilizing the same road, or parallel roads for it's advance. Contact would be resumed at a time not specified, but was generally agreed that it's accomplishment would be possible during the night of 14-15 December.

The order of march was outlined which included the M-8 scout car preceeding the column, to be followed by the assigned tank platoon. One platoon of infantry was ordered to ride the decks of the tanks for local security of these vehicles. The Task Force Commander was to be located immediately behind the tanks, to be followed by the Commander of Company "F", one platoon of Tank Destroyers with the remainder of Company "F" following in eight two and one-half ton trucks. (For Task Force

(15) A-10, A-11, Personal Knowledge

(16) A-2, p. 476. A-3, p. 48-50. A-4, p. 3-6.

order of march, see APPENDIX II).

Sufficient rations, water and ammunition were to be taken with the troops to sustain them for one day. It was anticipated that resupply would not be necessary before the next day.

Wire communications was to be provided by an accompanying construction team from Regimental Headquarters Company under the personal supervision of the Regimental Communications Officer, Captain Osborn Cooper. The Task Force Commander was in direct communication by radio with the Regimental Commander utilizing a SCR 284. In addition the Task Force Commander was provided with a SCR 300 with which to contact Company "F" and the AN/VRC 3 radios of the tanks, and the tank destroyer's M-8.

Five additional enlisted medical aid men and one medical administrative officer provided the medical support for the Task Force.

THE SITUATION AND PLANS OF COMPANY "F"

At 0500, 14 December, the Company Commander of "F" Company was apprised of the Regimental plan for the continued attack and was ordered to prepare his unit to accompany the Task Force. The efficiency of Company "F" had been materially reduced by the casualties sustained in the preceding thirty days of combat, and the fighting strength was approximately seventy-five men. One platoon from "E" Company was attached to "F" Company for this mission to increase it's fighting efficiency. General information concerning the Task Force composition, commander, time of expected departure and available transportation were discussed by the Battalion Commander with the Company Commander of "F" Company at this time. Specific instructions to Company Commander "F" Company were to be given

by the Task Force Commander.

Shortly after daylight the relief of the 2nd Battalion by the 3rd Battalion was accomplished. Company "F" was assembled and necessary reorganization was initiated. The second and third squads of the 2nd platoon were combined. This consolidated squad from the second platoon was moved to the first platoon, thus providing the first platoon with three squads of nine men each. The first platoon consolidated their three understrength squads into two squads of nine men each in an effort to maintain tactical integrity. The men remaining in the second platoon were moved to the third platoon providing approximate balance between the first and third platoons. The weapons platoon was understrength, but no replacements were available and no changes were made in its organization at this time. The attached platoon from "E" Company became the second platoon, and was designated "X" Platoon. First Lt. Earl H. Spracklen, the Executive Officer of "F" Company was given command of "X" platoon since no officer was sent by "E" Company for its command. T/Sgt. Lawrence E. Mether, originally platoon leader, second platoon "F" Company, was assigned to assist Lt. Spracklen. (17)

It was planned by Company Commander, "F" Company, that the third platoon would be used to ride the decks of the tanks in accordance with instructions received from the Task Force Commander. The remainder of the Company was to be assigned to the two and one-half ton trucks used for transportation. (See Detailed Composition of the Column, APPENDIX III). (18)

(17) A-9. Personal Knowledge
(18) A-9. Personal Knowledge

NARRATION

PHASE I: MOVEMENT TO CONTACT

At 1023 hours the Task Force, minus Company "F", departed Preuschdorf for the forward assembly area arriving at approximately 1100 hours. Upon his arrival, Colonel Blackshear issued the final orders previously mentioned. The forward assembly area was cleared at 1130 hours. No line of departure was designated.

The movement of the column from the assembly area (Point A) to Point B was uneventful. At Point B an undefended roadblock was encountered. The roadblock consisted of several heavy trees felled across the road. No bypass was available. No mines or booby-traps were present. Tanks were employed to reduce the roadblock, using tow cables to drag the trees clear of the road. The clearing of this obstacle required approximately thirty minutes.

The column proceeded quickly from Point B to a point two hundred yards north of Pfaffenschlick Pass (Point C). It was here that the first fire was received from the enemy.

The crossroad at Pfaffenschlick Pass and the road for some distance north of the Pass was under observation by the enemy. Direct fire weapons apparently had been previously registered on this target. The enemy allowed several vehicles to proceed beyond the Pass before making any attempt to stop them. The first indication that the enemy would contest the use of the Pass was ten or twelve rounds of high explosive and armor piercing shells striking in and around the column simultaneously. Several casualties were sustained at this point, among them was Captain James J. Barda, S-3 of the

Task Force. The one-quarter ton truck in which the Company Commander, "F" Company, had been riding received a direct hit and was completely disabled. The Company Commander joined the Task Force Commander in his vehicle and accompanied him for the remainder of the motor march. After a brief halt at this point, the Task Force was ordered to resume the march at increased speed. Sporadic artillery fire was received by the Task Force from Point C to Point D, but much of its effectiveness was lost because of the increased speed and dispersion of the vehicles. The M-8 scout car which was leading the column halted at the edge of the woods (Point D) affording it some concealment from the enemy. An enemy artillery concentration was being laid down just beyond this point. Troops dismounted from the tank decks and personnel carriers and sought available cover and concealment. It was believed by the Task Force Commander that the village of Climbach was unoccupied by foot troops, and that the artillery fire was being used by a delaying force to harass and impede the forward movement of the Task Force. He ordered the troops to mount the vehicles and ordered the commanders to proceed in column as before. This being accomplished, the column advanced approximately one thousand yards before it was halted abruptly. As the M-8 scout car topped the high ground immediately to the front (South) of Climbach, a mine planted in the road exploded which disabled the vehicle, and anti-tank fire was immediately placed on it killing or wounding all of its occupants. (19) The road leading to Climbach was a two-lane road, and the scout car was stopped in the center of it.

(19) A-5, p. 3. A-6, p. 5. A-8.

The shoulders of the road were extremely muddy and made vehicle passage exceptionally difficult. The drivers of the tanks were not willing to attempt passage of the disabled vehicle and continue the attack on Climbach because of the presence of mines and direct fire anti-tank guns still firing on the approach to the village.

PHASE II: CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY, THE FIGHT, AND PLANS FOR THE ASSAULT

As the column came to a halt, the troops dismounted from the personnel carriers and were assembled near them, awaiting orders for the continued attack on the objective. The Task Force Commander and the Company Commander of "F" Company moved forward to the vicinity of the M-8 scout car. Their reconnaissance revealed the presence of enemy foot troops defending the town supported by tanks and self-propelled guns on the high ground behind (North) of the town.

Personnel carriers had been released by the Task Force Commander shortly after his reconnaissance. The platoon of Tank Destroyers was ordered to go into position on the forward slope of the ridge and eliminate enemy direct fire weapons inflicting casualties on our troops. One platoon of infantry was ordered to support the employment of the Tank Destroyers, and provide local security for the guns. The third platoon of Company "F" was employed in this mission. A brief reconnaissance was made by the Tank Destroyer platoon leader, and one position was found suitable for the employment of one gun on the left of the road. The remaining three guns were ordered forward and were placed in action on the exposed forward slope of the ridge on the right of the road. The guns were towed over the crest of the ridge and onto the forward slope as far

as the mud would permit. The guns were then manhandled into position by the crews.

The movement by the Tank Destroyers and infantry to these forward slope positions began at approximately 1330 hours.

Although submitted to intense mortar, artillery and small arms fire the gun crews of the tank destroyer platoon successfully positioned their guns and were in action for sometime before they were neutralized. The three guns on the right side of the road were in action approximately an hour before being silenced. (20) The gun on the left side of the road, having some protection, remained in action most of the remainder of the day, although, the crew suffered severe casualties. The third platoon of "F" Company moved into position around the guns they were to protect. Throughout the afternoon they improved their positions by digging. The squad led by Sgt. Charles Henrikson was charged with the security of the left flank to include the support of the three inch guns in that sector. He led his squad from their positions near the tanks to positions near the guns. One of the outstanding individual performances of the day occurred in this sector. The report of Sgt. Henrikson is as follows; (21)

"A few yards ahead was a German machine gun nest, but they weren't expecting us from this direction and we surprised them. They were going to open up when Myers (PFC. Richard Myers, BAR man) gave a burst. There were two on the gun. One was dropped and the other took off with a light bipod machine gun. Well, this was just the beginning. The German went for reinforcements. Meanwhile, Myers and I jumped in the hole left by the Krauts. This was located just outside

(20) A-2, p. 476, A-3, p. 49. A-5, p. 3. A-6, p. 5.
(21) A-9.

the woods. I saw action in the woods and a couple of Krauts came out and surrendered. I sent Myers to the rear with the prisoners. I was now left alone and some Germans noticed this and saw their chance, so they thought. They started to set up another gun in the woods and each time I saw them setting it up I let them have it. It was getting twilight and no one around except two negroes with their legs off at the knees. The anti-tank gun was knocked out. One German I shot in the arm came out of the woods with "Kamerad". Well, I kept taking my ammunition out of my bandoliers and putting it in front of me because I thought this was my last moment. Each time the Krauts set up I shot the machine gunner. A couple of them came running at me from the left oblique and I killed one and got the other in the head. I guess he died later. Anyhow, I kept firing as fast as I dared without using up all of my ammunition. By this time elements of the company were entering the town".

The Task Force Command Post was established approximately one hundred and twenty-five yards behind the crest of the ridge shortly after the employment of the tank destroyer platoon and the rifle platoon of Company "F". In order that the Task Force Commander could maintain direct communication with the Regimental Commander, he returned to the Command Post.

The method of continuing the attack, and the successful completion of the assigned mission were delegated to the Company Commander, "F" Company.

The wire construction team from Regimental Headquarters had been able to maintain pace with the column as it progressed, and direct telephone communication with that Headquarters was

available throughout this action. (22)

Equipment failure caused a breakdown in radio communication between Company "F" and the Task Force Commander, who were using SCR-300 radios. The radio equipment in the armored vehicles performed as required, and were used to adjust artillery fires. The Company command net failed to function because of equipment failure and necessitated the use of foot messengers for communication within the Company. The SCR-536 radios used within this net failed shortly after the M-8 scout car was knocked out.

An aid station was also set up at this time near the Task Force CP by the medical administrative officer. Covered routes of evacuation were not available, and the aid men worked tirelessly and courageously under fire. Numerous examples of heroism by the medical aid men were displayed during the battle. (23)

The company command post was established near that of the Task Force. A company observation post was established on the crest of the ridge to the right of the road leading into Climbach. It was here that plans for the assault were made by Company Commander, "F" Company.

Four main problems were faced at this time:

- (1) Neutralize enemy fire superiority.
- (2) Resume forward motion of all troops.
- (3) Coordinate supporting fires.
- (4) Disseminate information to troops of plans to accomplish the above.

(22) A-10. Personal Knowledge
(23) A-9. Personal Knowledge

A map and terrain study indicated the liklieliest positions for enemy direct fire anti-tank weapons as hills 435, 376 and 378. Some defensive positions could be determined by visual observation of enemy troops. High ground to the southeast of Climbach appeared to be unoccupied by the enemy, and offered excellent positions for the support of a frontal assault.

In a conference with the artillery liaison officer, the Company Commander requested that artillery support be lent to effect the neutralizing of enemy fires. Excellent results were obtained by the liaison officer who received three battalions of Corps Artillery to support the organic medium artillery of the Division and the one battalion of light artillery in direct support of the Regiment. The Corps Artillery was given targets on hills 435, 376 and 378. The medium battalion was assigned the rear (northwest) section of Climbach, and the direct support battalion was given the forward (southeast) section of Climbach. All fires were to be brought down on order and all targets hit simultaneously. The direct support battalion was to lift on call, the remainder of the other battalions, after all guns had fired five volleys. No smoke screen was to be employed. Fire commenced when ordered by the Company Commander, "F" Company.

Show
on
Map?

The first platoon of "F" Company was ordered to occupy positions on the high ground to the east of Climbach. A messenger was to be dispatched to the Company Commander when the platoon was in position to support the attack. One section of heavy machine guns was attached to the first platoon.

The third platoon, which had been committed with the tank destroyer platoon was engaged in a fire fight with the enemy. Since their advance to positions near the tank destroyer guns, they had attempted to dig foxholes, but the soggy condition of the ground prevented more than six or eight inch ditches. Seepage at this point made their efforts to dig deeper unsuccessful. The temperature was approximately thirty-five degrees, and some casualties from exposure were sustained. The dispersion of this platoon made control difficult at best and precluded the possibility of using these men in the initial phases of the assault.

The second (X) platoon then, was used as the assault platoon, passing through the positions of the third platoon. The third platoon was used to support the second platoon, by fire, initially, and join the assault as the second (X) platoon passed through. One section of heavy machine guns was attached to the second (X) platoon for employment after the capture of the objective. The weapons platoon was to accompany the third platoon into Climbach for defense against possible counter-attack. Tentative positions for mortars and machine guns were given the platoon leader. The 81 mm mortars, from positions behind the ridge, were given first responsibility to support the second (X) platoon, second responsibility to support the first platoon and third to fire on targets of opportunity.

It was assumed that the platoon of tanks would participate, but the invitation was, vehemently, declined by the tank platoon leader.

This plan was submitted to the Task Force Commander by

the company commander, "F" Company. The time of attack was dependent upon the receipt of information that the first platoon had occupied positions as ordered. The plan, as submitted, was approved.

PHASE III: THE ASSAULT, CLEARANCE AND SECURITY OF CLIMBACH

The arrival of Pfc. Shane E. Riordan, the messenger from the first platoon, at 1500 hours, saw plans complete and everything in readiness for the assault. The artillery fire was dropped to perfection; the second platoon moved out at 1530 hours, supporting fires from the first and third platoons were well placed; fire from the 81 mm mortars left little to be desired. The assault was under way. The first rounds of the 928th Field Artillery Battalion were dropped approximately 75 yards in front of the positions occupied by the third platoon. The liaison officer lifted these fires in one hundred yard increments as the troops advanced. Very little fire was received by the assault troops after the initial artillery preparation. Foot troops followed closely behind the receding artillery, and were not delayed by enemy fires. The first houses in the outskirts of Climbach were reached at approximately 1540 hours. The defenders of Climbach were taken from their defensive positions on the outskirts by the second (X) platoon, disarmed and were sent to the rear to be collected by the third platoon and weapons units. Vicious artillery fire, followed closely by infantry units had broken the defenses of Climbach and had convinced the defenders that continued resistance was suicide. The artillery concentration had accomplished the purpose of inflicting casualties on those exposed to it, and forcing others to seek shelter. Before

those who took cover could reorganize for the defense, they were greeted by the business end of an infantryman's weapon.

Shortly after arrival in the village, a company command post was established, and a message was dispatched to the Task Force Commander to the effect that resistance had ceased in Climbach, and that the remaining few enemy soldiers were being collected. The time was approximately 1730 hours. The messengers who were sent to the Task Force Commander were ordered to continue to the first platoon positions, and notify the platoon leader that he was to clear that portion of town southeast of the main road junction. The messengers were to guide the platoon leader to the company CP when the assigned portion of town was cleared of enemy personnel. These messengers failed to reach the first platoon. However, a messenger from the first platoon arrived in the Company CP at 1745 hours and identical instructions were issued. The delayed entry into town by the first platoon until after dark caused considerable difficulty in the clearing of those houses assigned in its sector.

The Task Force Commander arrived in Climbach at approximately 1900 hours. Prior to his arrival in town the attached armor and tank destroyer units had been released to Regimental control. Neither of these units advanced into Climbach. The "F" Company CP was moved shortly after the Task Force Commander's arrival to a more central position in Climbach to facilitate control.

The mission of seizing Climbach and cutting the enemy supply route was accomplished by 2000 hours, 14 December 1944. The Task Force Commander was notified that the 1st and 3rd

battalions were abreast of this position, and that lateral contact patrols would be established. These patrols were selected from the weapons platoon. The patrol sent to contact the 3rd battalion returned in about one and one-half hours and reported their failure to contact troops from that unit. The Battalion Commander of the 1st Battalion returned with the other patrol in about 45 minutes.

A conference with the Regimental Commander was held by telephone shortly after the 1st Battalion Commander's arrival, and plans for the continued attack were discussed.

PHASE IV: MISSION CHANGED, A NIGHT ATTACK

Company "F" was ordered to continue the attack immediately to the Northeast to the German border and cut the road from Wissembourg through Weiler to Bergzabern. The 2nd Battalion, which was advancing along the same route Task Force Blackshear had taken earlier in the day, was ordered into Climbach to secure the town as Company "F" made its departure. The platoon leaders of Company "F" had been assembled, and were issued the order to continue the attack shortly after the message from the Task Force Commander had been received. Company "F", minus all attachments, with only a fighting strength of approximately fifty officers and men quickly assembled to continue the attack, and moved out prior to the arrival in Climbach of the 2nd battalion. Using the road leading northeast from town, "F" company advanced to the vicinity of the cemetery. From prepared positions the enemy subjected the company to heavy small arms, mortar and direct fire artillery. Twin pillboxes, one on each side of the road seemed to deliver the bulk of the fire. The difficulty of reducing these positions and neutralizing enemy

fire was increased by darkness and the absence of armor and tank destroyers. Two messengers were dispatched to the Task Force Commander requesting permission to pull back into the town after the attack was halted, and one unsuccessful flanking maneuver to the right had failed miserably due to the grazing machine gun fire received. These messengers did not return, nor did the next ones dispatched by the Company Commander. Company "F" was ordered to withdraw to the protection of the buildings in the outskirts of Climbach by its commander, who then returned to the Task Force Command Post. At the same time the Commander of "F" Company arrived at the Task Force Command Post the Regimental Commander also arrived, and, when apprised of the situation, ordered Company "F" to establish defensive positions and local security at its present location and prepare for the continued attack on 15 December.

In summary, the mission assigned Company "F", 411th Infantry, the capture and holding of Climbach, France was successfully completed at 2000 hours 14 December 1944.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. INTELLIGENCE

In and around Climbach were found twenty-five to thirty dead Germans, and there were approximately twenty-five prisoners taken throughout this action. It is not known how many of the enemy escaped. These figures, plus the numerous defensive positions found, indicated that a greater force than anticipated held the town against our attack. The information that the village was not heavily defended, was obtained by prisoner interrogation and was not accurate. More definite information regarding numbers, types, and

dispositions of enemy troops could have been obtained during the hours of darkness 13-14 December by the employment of a patrol from the Regimental I & R Platoon. The failure to so employ a patrol of this nature delayed the movement of the Task Force at Point B (roadblock), and prevented cross-country movement of the tanks and tank destroyers, and necessitated hasty decisions by the Task Force Commander regarding employment which could have been anticipated before the Task Force was committed. The route selected for the attack on Climbach was the most direct and was, also, the most exposed. The surprise fire at Pfaffenschlick Pass and other exposed points would have been evident by map reconnaissance, and an alternate route which afforded more concealment and cover could have been used. The rapid commitment of the tank destroyer platoon and the platoon of infantry can be directly attributed to the lack of information available to the Commander.

2. EMPLOYMENT OF TANK DESTROYERS

A hasty evaluation of the situation by the Task Force Commander convinced him that rapid emplacement of supporting weapons could reduce the enemy resistance. The three inch guns were ordered forward to be emplaced on the exposed slope of the ridge. The gun crews were immediately subjected to a blistering hail of fire which caused excessive casualties in men and equipment. Three of the four guns were lost within an hour of their employment. These guns could have been used to greater advantage by employing them laterally behind the ridge. These partially defiladed positions would have afforded

cover for the men and guns, and would have reduced materially the number of casualties sustained. The fire from these weapons, had they been available during the assault phase, could have been used to assist the movement of foot troops into the town at an earlier hour.

3. INFANTRY PLATOON EMPLOYMENT

One rifle platoon was ordered onto the exposed forward slope of the ridge as local security for the tank destroyer platoon. The positions of all four guns were exposed, well within small arms supporting range, and the danger of capture of these weapons was negligible. The employment of this platoon in such a manner greatly weakened an already depleted rifle company. It may have been advisable to employ this platoon along the crest of the ridge or slightly behind it, protecting the guns by fire, if need be. The company commander could then have disengaged these troops at any time for any purpose if he so desired. Control of the platoon could have been easily maintained, and the casualty rate suffered greatly reduced.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

Wire communication was exceptionally good throughout, because of the personal effort of the Communication Officer. The construction crew maintained pace with the column during the motor march and direct wire communications was available at all times.

The situation which existed in radio communication was altogether different. All batteries for SCR 536s and SCR 300s were replaced early on the morning of 14 December. The performance of these radios was disappointing, and their failure

hindered the control of the company and reduced the speed in resuming the attack. None of the sets worked at any time during the operation. Neither extreme distances between the SCR 536s nor the line-of-sight characteristic of the SCR 300s appeared to be the reason for the failure. Their failures to operate were directly attributed to a bad shipment of batteries received through normal supply channels. Radio communication at company level had been adequate prior to this action and when new batteries were received after this action the radios again functioned properly.

5. TANK-INFANTRY COORDINATION

The lack of tank-infantry coordination in this action is clearly evident. The refusal of the tank platoon commander to accompany the infantry into Climbach greatly jeopardized the success of the attack. A coordinated counter-attack against the assault troops after their arrival in town may have resulted in the failure of the mission and the loss of personnel. Mines were not encountered by troops of "F" Company in their assault on Climbach and the fears of these obstacles expressed by the tank platoon leader were unfounded. Anti-tank weapons were eliminated during the artillery preparation. There seems to be no reason for the refusal of the tank platoon leader to accompany the advancing troops except that this was the first mission this platoon was assigned within the 411th Infantry Regiment and no prior training or coordination had been effected between elements of the 47th Tank Battalion and the 411th Infantry Regiment.

6. ARTILLERY SUPPORT

The plan for the use of artillery and its implementation was extremely effective. Map reconnaissance, together with personal observation, allowed the artillery forward observer and commander of "F" Company to determine the approximate firing positions of enemy guns, probable troop concentration areas and prepared defensive positions. The amount of artillery employed allowed sufficient fire to be placed on several enemy positions without disclosing the plan of fire. The employment of the light artillery in front of the advancing infantry clearly demonstrated the desirability of such a method. The falling artillery prevents the exposure of enemy troops, forces them to take cover, and allows attacking forces to close and destroy or capture them before the shock of intensive fire has worn off.

7. THE NIGHT ATTACK

It is felt that the decision to continue the attack at night with "F" Company in its depleted condition without any attachments or support whatsoever was unwise. If the enemy had chosen to allow "F" Company to pass through their positions without resistance and then attacked Climbach it would have split the Regiment with the 1st Battalion on the east, third battalion on the west and the 2nd battalion (minus) on the south. This would have disrupted the entire plan of the Regiment. If "F" Company had been successful in the assigned mission of cutting the road from Wissembourg to Bergzabern, which was more than three miles from Climbach, they would have been vulnerable to a counter-attack or being cut off from the Regiment. There was no known plan for "F" Company

to be reinforced or relieved from this mission at any specific time by any elements of the Regiment.

LESSONS

1. Every effort must be made to obtain complete information and intelligence of the terrain and enemy prior to an attack.

2. Even though speed is of the essence, careful selection of partially defiladed gun positions should be made rather than expose guns and crews to direct enemy fire.

3. Positions selected for infantry troops should afford the maximum cover and concealment available.

4. Newly drawn radio batteries should be tested after installation and prior to their use in action.

5. Tanks and infantry should have prior training together before being committed to action.

6. Infantry troops should follow their supporting artillery fires as closely as possible to gain maximum surprise.

7. Fresh infantry troops should be utilized in making night attacks only after detailed planning and reconnaissance.

APPENDIX I

ORGANIZATION OF THE TASK FORCE

COMMANDER

Lt. Col. John P. Blackshear, Regimental
Executive Officer.

S-3

Capt. James J. Barda, Assistant Regimental
S-3.

Company "F", 411th Infantry (reinforced)

1st Platoon, Company "C", 47th Tank Battalion

3rd Platoon, Company "C", 614th Tank Destroyer
Battalion

928th Field Artillery Battalion (light) in
direct support, with the Assistant S-3 as
Liaison Officer and forward observer.

VI Corps Artillery support "on call" through
the 928th Field Artillery Battalion

Regimental Communications Officer to lay
wire immediately behind the task force.

APPENDIX II

TASK FORCE ORDER OF MARCH

M-8 scout car from Company "C", 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

1st Platoon, Company "C", 47th Tank Battalion with one Platoon from Company "F" riding on the decks of the tanks.

Task Force Commander and S-3 in one 1/4 ton truck.

Company Commander of Company "F" in one 1/4 ton truck.

Third Platoon, Company "C", 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Company "F", (reinforced), minus one platoon on tanks, riding in eight $2\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks.

APPENDIX III

DETAILED COMPOSITION OF THE COLUMN

M-8 scout car from Company "C", 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

1st Platoon, Company "C", 47th Tank Battalion with the Third Platoon of Company "F" riding on the decks of the tanks.

Task Force Commander and S-3 in one 1/4 ton truck.

Company Commander of Company "F" in one 1/4 ton truck.

Third Platoon, Company "C", 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion

Company "F", (reinforced), minus the third platoon on tanks, riding in eight $2\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks in the following order:

Truck #1 - - - - - 1st platoon

Truck #2 - - - - - 1st platoon

Truck #3 - - - - - Company headquarters and
part of the weapons platoon.

Truck #4 - - - - - Weapons platoon

Truck #5 - - - - - Platoon of heavy machine guns
from Company "H"

Truck #6 - - - - - Platoon of 81 mm mortars from
Company "H"

Truck #7 - - - - - Platoon "X"

Truck #8 - - - - - Platoon "X"